

Communication PRinciples for Principals

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WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

We have a wonderful story to tell. The following guidance will allow our employees to appropriately respond to any requests from the media.

KNOW YOUR PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

- All installations have a Public Affairs Office/Officer (PAO) who can be called for assistance and guidance on media issues. In fact, you should never agree to media requests or interviews without coordinating with the local PAO first.
- Each DSO has a public affairs contact person who can provide help and guidance.
- The DoDEA and area PAOs are always available to assist principals and employees with any media related issues.

ACCESS TO THE INSTALLATION OR SCHOOL

- The commander has the right and responsibility to control media access to any installation. This is done through the PAO.
- Principals have the right to request that all media fully coordinate their activities on school grounds, in school facilities, and classrooms during the school day with the school principal.
- Just because the media may be on your installation, don't assume they are doing stories with the blessing of the commander. Always check with the PAO before working with any reporters. That is a basic courtesy in media relations.
- World events have focused a great deal of attention on the military and military installations around the globe. There is a great deal of interest in deployments, family support, and force protection. Schools are a key element of stability in the lives of children. We have a good story to tell in this regard. However, we must protect the privacy of our families and be sensitive to concerns from the command and our parents.
- Talk among the staff about media issues and respect any guidance provided by the command.



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- Talking to reporters is your decision. You may choose whether you want to be interviewed. Keep in mind that those who refuse, particularly in leadership positions, can give the impression that they are withholding information. As a DoD activity, we abide by the Secretary of Defense's Principles of Information, found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/admin/prininfo.html>.
- News media representatives should always contact the principal, the DSO or Area PAO to request an interview. This is a practice of journalistic courtesy. We do not ever want to appear to control access to our students/teachers or censor what our students say, but school administrators have a right to know when the news media is interested in talking with a student, teacher, or principal.
- If approached independently by a reporter, contact your PAO for assistance.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO TALK WITH THE MEDIA IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.

However, when you refuse to talk with the media, you may give the impression that you are withholding information, and risk sending the wrong message about your unit and your mission. You can help reporters get it right! Ask for guidance from your local PAO.

THE CARDINAL RULE IS: STAY IN AREA OF EXPERTISE AND AUTHORITY!

- Talk about what YOU know – YOUR job, mission, classroom or school.
- Remember that you are representing your school and ultimately, the Department of Defense.
- Don't try to answer questions that are above your level or outside your area of expertise.
- Avoid political or foreign policy matters.
- Don't respond to rumors.
- Don't discuss specific force protection/security procedures and practices.
- If the reporter wants information that isn't within your scope, refer them to the local military Public Affairs Office or to the DoDEA, Area, or District Public Affairs Officer (<http://www.dodea.edu/pressroom/contact.cfm>)
- If you are in an area facing authorized departures or evacuations, let the local command speak to the issues. They have the best information.

SOME TIPS FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS

- Don't respond to statements. Let the reporter ask a question before you respond.
- Don't try to answer "what if" questions.
- Remain in control of the interview. Control your answers, your emotions, and the amount of time you spend in an interview. Keep your comments brief and to the point. NEVER be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- When presented with multi-part questions, answer one part at a time.

- Take your time and don't be pressured by silence. Think about your answers before you respond.
- If a reporter becomes aggressive or you feel uncomfortable, politely end the interview.
- Relax. You'll look more confident and assured.
- Speak at a slow, conversational pace.
- Ignore cameras and talk to the interviewer.
- You have the right to give an opinion, but remember, it is your opinion as a private citizen, and not as a representative of the school or Department of Defense. When you are being interviewed about a school matter or policy, you are acting in a capacity as an official representative of the school and of the Department of Defense.

“OFF THE RECORD”

Approach the interview with the belief that there is no such thing as “OFF THE RECORD” and that everything you say can or may appear in print or in a broadcast.

COMMON SENSE

Common sense is the best indicator of appropriateness when dealing with the media. Please be aware that coverage, in most cases, is very positive for our system and our students. We provide a critical quality of life component for military families. Teaching and learning is what we do, and we do it well. Each of our schools has a role to play in being an integral part of the total plan to care for families during difficult times. Experience has taught us that schools are a critical element of stability for our students and their parents. Any national press coverage offers us an opportunity to highlight the many quality programs we have and the numerous successes in our DoD Schools overseas and in the United States and its territories. In turn, every comment by an employee reflects in some way on our organization.

Working with the media can be a good -- even enjoyable -- opportunity for military personnel, civilian employees, schools, units, families and reporters. Just remember a few simple rules and use the expertise available from the Public Affairs Office. Should you need additional information or have questions, please contact the Public Affairs Officer.

Department of Defense Education Activity

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